

Clifton Mineral Hot Springs Bath House
Clifton Townsite
Park Avenue
Clifton
Greenlee County
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-191

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
CLIFTON MINERAL HOT SPRINGS BATH HOUSE

HABS No. AZ-191

Location:

Clifton Townsite, Park Avenue, Clifton, Greenlee County, Arizona

Significance:

Associated with commerce in Clifton and the development of Clifton.

Description:

The bath house building is located near the San Francisco River. The stuccoed masonry building is composed of three volumes: a central tower flanked by two wings. The tower, square in plan, has a domed roof with a pair of infilled arched openings at each side. A projecting belt course appears to divide the tower into two levels. The northwest wing of the building has a low-pitched hip roof covered in asphalt shingles. This wing is entered through an arcaded corner porch. Three arched casement windows appear under the front-facing gable. A concrete ramp has been sensitively added to the side of the entry porch. The southeast wing of the building has a flat roof with parapets. The entrance to this wing is centrally located flanked by multiple high windows. Between the windows are masonry pilasters topped with concrete urns. A staircase with wrought iron handrails leads up to the entry. The parapets of this wing are scalloped. The windows throughout the building are either wood double-hung, with a four-over-four pattern, or wood casement, multi-light.

History:

The Clifton Mineral Hot Springs Bath House was constructed in 1928. It first opened for business in January of 1929. Its construction is most closely associated with a desire to diversify the economy of Clifton in the 1920s, an era of depressed copper prices and reduced mining activity for Clifton. To replace mining as an economic mainstay of the town, Clifton residents turned to tourism as a way to bring visitors and income to their community. Timing for the construction of the building could hardly have been worse, coming at the start of the great depression of the thirties, and the building never lived up to the promise of luring tourists to Clifton.

The knowledge of highly-mineralized heated waters in the Clifton area dates to prehistoric times, when Native Americans utilized the free-flowing waters from hot springs. These ancient residents of Clifton would hollow out pools in the sandy bed of the San Francisco River and divert the heated water into the pools. Here they would soak in the mineral water, said to be healthful for healing wounds and illness. As early as 1887 Frank Woodard laid claim to a hot springs site near the present location of the railroad depot and made a good income supplying baths to the weary miners.¹

There were actually two locations for hot springs in Clifton, one on the west side near the present location of the railroad depot and one on the east side where the bath house would eventually be constructed. As Clifton became more developed, miners and others took their baths elsewhere.

The hot springs were largely forgotten.

The shut down of the mines and smelter in 1921 and the sale of the Arizona Copper Company to the Phelps Dodge Corporation caused an economic slowdown in Clifton in the early twenties. Local boosters began to search for ways to bring visitors to Clifton and it was not long before they rediscovered the hot springs. In June of 1923 town boosters sent samples of the water to chemist H.C. Smoot of the Copper Queen Smelter in Bisbee. Another set of samples was sent to Los Angeles. Mayor Peter Riley received the reports that the water "was good for what ails you" with enthusiasm. In August of 1923 Mayor Riley persuaded the Town Council to authorize Town Engineer A.J. Kerr to sink a shaft at the hot springs location near the railroad depot.²

In this instance the timing of the town officials was good. In September of 1923 they learned that the Methodist Church was seeking locations for constructing a tubercular sanatorium. Town boosters invited the Methodist officials to visit. After A.J. Kerr resigned to become Greenlee County Engineer, the Town Council contracted with Tom Corlyon to sink a shaft at the hot springs. By October he had sunk the shaft to twenty feet but reported that the main flow had not yet been struck.³

Over the next few months Clifton boosters waged a campaign to lure the Methodists to Clifton while at the same time they continued to develop the hot springs. Mayor Riley reported that Clifton had the backing of the Arizona State Methodists for the selection of Clifton as a hospital site in November of 1923. By March of 1924 the Town Council enlisted the help of Phelps Dodge to develop the springs. The copper company authorized J.R. Smith of its staff to install an electric pump at the springs. By April a flow of 12,000 gallons per day had been developed. A committee of Methodists headed by the Reverend C. C. Jarrel visited Clifton at the end of April and reported that they preferred the hot springs as a site for their hospital. By September the flow at the springs had increased to over 100,000 gallons per day. Observers noted that there was "too much to use" and further work was abandoned. The town received another blow when the Methodists abandoned Clifton as a site for the hospital.⁴

With the departure of the Methodists from the field, Clifton boosters looked for others to take on the hot springs project. In October of 1924 they persuaded Albert J. Smith of Phoenix to take a sixty-day option on the hot springs property. Smith began to promote the project in Phoenix and Douglas. He lobbied Phelps Dodge officials for the purchase of the old A.C. manager's residence on the east side (see HABS No. AZ-194) as a site for the hot springs. Smith's proposed venture failed to materialize.⁵

With the hot springs momentum at a standstill, Clifton boosters turned to other community improvements. Members of the Clifton American Legion Post organized the Clifton Swimming Pool Company on September 24, 1924. The Arizona Corporation Commission granted the company a charter in January of 1925 and the members began to make plans for a community swimming pool on the east side near the auto camping grounds. Plans for a swimming pool in Clifton were not new; as early as 1911 residents called for a swimming pool near the east side hot springs. This time, however, boosters stuck on the novel idea of selling shares in the corporation as a way of raising money. Shares sold for \$100 each. The plan may have been a bit too ambitious for Clifton at the time as the economy was still in a depressed state.⁶

Two years passed without success in raising funds for the swimming pool. In February of 1927 the American Legion members approached the Town Council for help with the swimming pool project. On February 7, 1927 the Town Council appointed a committee to investigate the situation. The

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committee reported back on February 25 that the project was feasible and that Phelps Dodge had agreed to pay part of the cost. The Council then authorized construction of the pool. The pool would be constructed on the east side, across the San Francisco River from the "famous" hot springs. The plans called for the installation of baths in conjunction with the pool which would take advantage of the medicinal and curative powers of the hot springs waters located on the east side. Town officials estimated the pool would cost \$12,000.⁷

City officials wasted little time in starting the project. Excavation for the pool began March 15, 1927 under the direction of foreman O.J. Cotey. Town Engineer A.J. Kerr (back from a stint with the County) directed the project. Phelps Dodge and the Clifton Lumber Company donated the materials. To alleviate unemployment conditions, the Town used day labor on the job. Hot water pumped from springs would heat the pool. The work was delayed several times by rain, but by the end of April Kerr reported that the pool would be ready on June 1. The pool opened at 5 p.m. on that day. Dedication ceremonies were brief since everyone wanted to get in the pool. The pool measured 110 by 45 feet, with a capacity of 155,000 gallons which consisted of a mix of hot well water and cool city water.⁸

The success of the swimming pool project encouraged town officials to begin boosting the local hot springs once again. On May 2, 1927, the Town Council authorized advertising in medical journals for doctors who might be interested in developing the hot springs. Dr. O.J. Bundy of Marlin Wells, Texas, began corresponding with Mayor Peter Riley regarding the hot springs. In August of 1927 the Clifton Commercial Club, a local booster group, held a meeting at the YMCA building (La Casa Grande - see HABS AZ-183) about developing baths at the hot springs. Mayor Riley reported that Dr. Bundy was planning a visit in October.⁹

Bundy, an assistant at the Buie Clinic hot springs in Marlin Wells, Texas, did not arrive until December but when he did he declared that Clifton was the "ideal location for a health resort." Dr. Bundy offered the residents of Clifton a proposition. He was willing to invest five or six thousand dollars of his own money and move to Clifton without benefit of a salary guarantee if the residents of Clifton would raise funds for the erection of a bath house. The Clifton Commercial Club took Bundy up on his offer and established a committee to raise funds for the project.¹⁰

The committee worked quickly. By January of 1928 they had contacted El Paso architect Guy L. Frasier who prepared a set of plans for the bath house. It called for twelve baths (six each for men and women), cooling rooms, sweat rooms, and massage rooms. Frasier estimated a brick building with a stucco finish would cost \$18,000. The Clifton Commercial Club committee then began circulating petitions for a town contribution to the project. Members felt that the town could sponsor a bond issue to raise the money. For his part, Dr. Bundy estimated that 20,000 people would visit Clifton each year to take the baths. The Town Council considered the bond proposition at a meeting on February 11, 1928, but members were cool to the idea. They suggested that the committee find other ways of financing the project.¹¹

The Clifton Commercial Club took this setback in stride and scheduled a mass meeting in the first week of March of 1928 to plan their next move. The members had the advantage of working from the same script that the American Legion members had used to spur construction of the swimming pool. At the mass meeting the boosters decided to organize a corporation and sell shares to raise money for the project. By this time, the economy of Clifton had improved and the boosters had little trouble raising funds. At the meeting, town residents pledged \$4,000 toward the project. The committee estimated that they would need to raise \$16,000 for the project and decided to capitalize their corporation at \$24,000. Shares would be sold in \$50.00 increments.¹²

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Although this seemed like a good beginning to the project, boosters were overwhelmed by the response to the idea. At a second mass meeting held on March 13, 1928, over \$30,000 in shares was subscribed. Phelps Dodge led the way by purchasing 100 of the \$50.00 shares and offered a twenty-five year lease on a building site for \$1.00 per year. The boosters selected the name of Clifton Mineral Hot Springs, Inc. as the name for their corporation and increased its capitalization to \$50,000. By the end of March the directors of the corporation had sent their incorporation papers to Phoenix for filing and selected a site for the building between the swimming pool and the park. Architect Frasier arrived from El Paso to inspect the site. With over \$14,000 collected by the middle of April from nearly 200 town residents, Frasier began to draft the construction drawings. In a surprise move, Dr. Bundy then informed the directors that he could not wait any longer and had taken an offer to direct a hot springs at Silverton, Texas.¹³

The directors paid little heed to the absence of Dr. Bundy and approved the construction plans by mid-April. The Town of Clifton contributed to the project by furnishing transportation for hauling material to the site and agreeing to load and unload the truckloads of brick, rock, and gravel needed for construction. The directors went out to bid in May and in the first week of June awarded the construction contract to Clifton contractor O. J. Cotey. Cotey submitted the low bid of \$17,875.¹⁴

Contractor O. J. Cotey broke ground for the project on June 18, 1928. The directors of the Clifton Mineral Hot Springs then contacted Arizona Congressman Lewis Douglas and invited him to set the cornerstone on the building. The directors scheduled the date of the ceremony for Saturday, August 11. On that day Congressman Douglas placed a copper box in a niche constructed in the building. The box, welded air-tight, contained a copy of the Copper Era newspaper, three copies of the Arizona Republican newspaper, a list of officials of the Clifton Mineral Hot Springs corporation, and a list of city and county officials. The box was placed in the brick wall and covered with a special copper plate designed by engineer A.J. Kerr and made in Clifton by employees of Phelps Dodge. The plate weighed eighteen pounds and carried the inscription "Clifton Mineral Hot Springs 1928." Congressman Douglas laid the cornerstone at 7 p.m. before a large audience.¹⁵

It took some time for O.J. Cotey to complete the construction of the building, as he ran into problems with his bonding company. Construction stopped in October until the two sides could reach agreement, but soon resumed. In the meantime, the directors contracted with Dr. K. Bygness of Rogers Park, Illinois to take charge of the bath house as resident manager. Dr. Bygness arrived in Clifton on November 1, 1928, and prepared the specifications for the purchase of equipment in the building. On December 13, 1928, the directors accepted the completed building from contractor Cotey and awaited the arrival of the equipment so it could be installed. The directors also contracted with Mrs. Madge McCabe of Denver, Colorado, to fill the position of nurse and attendant for the women's section of the bath house.¹⁶

The formal opening of the bath house took place on Sunday, January 6, 1929 at 2 p.m. T.G. Norris of Prescott, President of the Arizona Bar Association, delivered the opening address. Over 200 people attended the ceremony. Norris and other speakers stated that the bath house was one of the finest in the West and "complete in every detail." Price of a mineral bath was \$1.00 and a bath with a massage cost \$1.50.¹⁷

Despite the considerable enthusiasm of Clifton residents and shareholders in the bath house, it soon became apparent that the building suffered from a lack of customers. In February of 1929, Clifton Mayor Peter Riley and Greenlee County Chamber of Commerce Director F. S. Doucette prepared a display model of the building to take to Arizona cities and towns in an attempt to drum up business. Although the display caused a "mild sensation" in Phoenix as several hundred people

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crowded around the miniature bath house on display at the Adams Hotel, those crowds did not travel to Clifton for the baths. The depression of the 1930s further curtailed business. By May of 1930 when Mayor Riley was elected President of the Clifton Mineral Hot Springs corporation, the building was operating at a loss. It closed a year later. The building was reopened briefly in 1932, but it never lived up to its expectations as a means to draw visitors to Clifton. Two doctors operated a clinic in the building until 1935.¹⁸

In the forties Phelps Dodge purchased the building and operated it as the Clifton Clinic. In the mid sixties Ed Danenhaur moved his insurance business into the building, which also served as a Phelps Dodge collections office. Damaged in the flood of October 1983, by 1987 the insurance office was closed.¹⁹

Sources (endnotes):

1. Clifton Clarion April 27, 1887 (I, 3: 1); Forrest E. Oucette, "Clifton - At the Foot of the Rainbow," Progressive Arizona 9: 1 (July, 1929): 30.
2. Copper Era June 15, 1923 (I, 1: 3); August 3, 1923 (I, 5: 5); August 10, 1923 (I, 3: 2).
3. Copper Era September 7, 1923 (I, 1: 5-6); September 14, 1923 (I, 5: 1); October 5, 1923 (I, 1: 5); October 19, 1923 (I, 3: 1).
4. Copper Era November 16, 1923 (I, 1: 4); February 2, 1924 (I, 1: 1); March 14, 1924 (I, 1: 4); April 11, 1924 (I, 1: 1); April 18, 1924 (I, 1: 5); April 25, 1924 (I, 1: 1); May 2, 1924 (I, 1: 1); July 18, 1924 (I, 1: 1); July 25, 1924 (I, 1: 3-4); August 1, 1924 (I, 1: 5-6); September 12, 1924 (I, 1: 5); September 19, 1924 (I, 1: 6).
5. Copper Era October 24, 1924 (I, 1: 3-4); November 14, 1924 (I, 8: 3).
8. Arizona Corporation Commission "dead files" at the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records, Phoenix; Copper Era June 16, 1911 (I, 3: 2); January 16, 1925 (I, 1: 4); April 17, 1925 (I, 1: 3-4); May 8, 1925 (I, 1: 6).
7. Copper Era February 12, 1927 (I, 1: 3-4); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, February 7, 1927 and February 25, 1927.
8. Copper Era March 12, 1927 (I, 1: 5-6); April 23, 1927 (I, 1: 1); May 28, 1927 (I, 1: 1); June 4, 1927 (I, 1: 4); June 25, 1927 (I, 1: 4).
9. Copper Era July 30, 1927 (I, 1: 3); August 13, 1927 (I, 1: 5); September 24, 1927 (I, 1: 1); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, May 2, 1927.
10. Copper Era December 10, 1927 (I, 1: 1 and I, 8: 3).
11. Copper Era December 3, 1927 (I, 1: 1); January 11, 1928 (I, 1: 1); January 28, 1928 (I, 1: 1); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, February 11, 1928.
12. Copper Era February 25, 1928 (I, 1: 1); March 3, 1928 (I, 1: 3-4).
13. Copper Era March 10, 1928 (I, 1: 1-2); March 17, 1928 (I, 1: 1-2); March 31, 1928 (I, 1: 8); April 14, 1928 (I, 1: 2). For information on the corporation, see the Arizona Corporation Commission "dead files" at the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records, Phoenix.

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14. Copper Era April 21, 1928 (l, 1: 6); May 19, 1928 (l, 1: 1); June 9, 1928 (l, 1: 2); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, April 2, 1928.
15. Copper Era June 23, 1928 (l, 1: 6); July 14, 1928 (l, 1: 1); July 28, 1928 (l, 1: 6); August 4, 1928 (l, 1: 1-2) August 11, 1928 (l, 1: 1); August 18, 1928 (l, 1: 1-2).
16. Copper Era October 13, 1928 (l, 1: 4); November 3, 1928 (l, 1: 6); December 8, 1928 (l, 5: 1); December 15, 1928 (l, 1: 2 and l, 5: 2).
17. Copper Era December 22, 1928 (l, 1: 3); January 5, 1928 (l, 1: 1 and l, 1: 6); January 12, 1929 (l, 1: 6); "Announcing the Opening of the Clifton Mineral Hot Springs Bath House," pamphlet published by the Clifton Mineral Hot Springs, 1928, on file at Arizona Collection, Hayden Library, Arizona State University, Tempe; Forrest E. Doucette, "Clifton: At the Foot of the Rainbow," Progressive Arizona 7: 1 (July, 1928): 9-10.
18. Copper Era January 26, 1929 (l, 1: 6); February 2, 1929 (l, 1: 2); May 17, 1930 (l, 1: 3); October 8, 1932 (l, 1: 6); Bill Conger, "Landmark Begins a New Life," Morenci Copper Review, August, 1987.
19. Bill Conger, "Landmark Begins a New Life," Morenci Copper Review, August, 1987.

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